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THE "WEST MIDLAND" OF THE ROMANCES

In 1864 when Richard Morris produced the first edition of *Pearl, Cleanness and Patience*,¹ he devoted a section of his Preface to a study of the dialect of the poems. After discussing the Middle English dialects in general, Dr. Morris came to the conclusion that the poems under consideration were in a West Midland dialect and were probably written in Lancashire.² As he had already decided that *Syr Gawayn and the Grene Knyzt* (GGK) was by the same author, it followed that this poem also was in the West Midland dialect. Similarly he considered the *Destruction of Troy* "a genuine West Midland production"³ and assigned *William of Palerne* to Shropshire.⁴

This view of the dialect of GGK and many other alliterative poems has been accepted as correct down to the present; indeed the statement that GGK and many of its fellows were written in the West Midland is generally made without qualification. I need hardly give the long list of citations that could be made of editions of poems and books on literary history.⁵ The present attitude is well summarized by Professor Wells, who assigns most of the early alliterative poems to the West Midland.⁶

¹ *Early English Alliterative Poems*, E.E.T.S., Vol. 1.

² Pp. xxiv-xxv.

³ P. ix.

⁴ P. xxiv, n. 5.

⁵ E.g., Ten Brink, *Early English Literature* (Eng. trans.), p. 336; Schofield, *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer*, p. 215; Brandl, *Paul's Grundriss*, II, 661; Osgood, *The Pearl*, p. xii; Bateson, *Patience*, p. 32; Gollancz, *Patience*, Preface, p. 4.

⁶ *Manual*, pp. 240, 578. See also under each document.

With this unanimity of opinion among students of Middle English literature, it is surprising to find that the grammarians make practically no distinction between the East and the West Midland dialects. After mentioning the texts (e.g., Myrc's works) which certainly belong to the West Midland, Professor Morsbach says that such documents as the *Alliterative Poems*, which were apparently written on the northern boundary of the West Midland, are of little value as evidences of dialect because they show mixture of Northern and (West) Midland elements.¹ More striking still is this note:

Grössere durchgreifende unterschiede zwischen dem *westlichen* und *östlichen* mittellande giebt es kaum. Die endung *-es* für die 2 und 3 sing. praes. ind., die man für das nördliche westmittelland geltend gemacht hat, findet sich nur in solchen texten, die an der nördlichen grenze oder sogar noch im südlichen norden zu lokalisieren sind (wie. z.b. die sog. *Alliterative Poems*). Uebrigens findet sich die betr. endung *-es* auch nicht selten im norden des *östlichen* mittellandes. Das *eigentliche westmittelland* (z.b. Shropshire) hat im praesens dieselbe flexions-endungen wie das östliche mittelland (vgl. Myrc and Audelay . . .) Dasselbe gilt für die 2 pers. sing. ind. des schwachen praeteritums wie *louedes*, *louedest*.²

Kaluza dismisses the entire matter with this statement:

Die früher übliche Scheidung zwischen Ost- und Westmittelländisch ist nach Morsbach (*Me. Gr.*, p. 15) nicht gerechtfertigt, da zwischen dem Osten und dem Westen des Mittellandes keinerlei durchgreifende dialektische Unterschiede bestehen.³

and he pays no attention to the peculiarities of the alliterative poems. It is interesting to note that John Trevisa, though in somewhat ambiguous terms, says that there was little difference between East and West Midland.⁴

What, then, is the basis of the prevailing opinion that the alliterative poems were written in the West Midland? To find this we must go back to Dr. Morris' discussion of the dialect of the poems in MS Nero A.X. I shall present his evidences one by one and criticize them.

¹ *Mittelenglische Grammatik*, p. 9.

² *M. e. Gram.*, 15 anm. Morsbach implies some difference between the two dialects, but he indicates only some phonological peculiarities found more often in the west than in the east.

³ *Hist. Gram.* (1906), I, 27.

⁴ See Emerson's *Middle English Reader*, p. 225, ll. 19-21.

1. The inflection of the verb in the present indicative is: singular, first person *-e*, second person *-es*, third person *-es*, plural *-en*. "The peasantry of Cheshire and Lancashire still preserve the verbal inflexions which prevailed in the fourteenth century," and their forms are identical with those just given.¹

The facts stated are correct, with the addition that in the poems the plural often has dropped the *-n* and sometimes appears as *-es* or *-eȝ*.² In the modern dialects, however, the inflexion given is found not only in Cheshire and Lancashire but in "most of the North Midland dialects," Southeastern East Midland, South Lancashire, Cheshire, Shropshire, Warwick, Herefordshire, etc.³ The modern dialects are evidently of little use in this instance; they do not limit the forms to any definite locality.

Morris also refers to the forms of the present inflexion in "the ancient examples of the Lancashire dialect contained in Mr. Robson's *Metrical Romances*, the *Boke of Curtasye*, and *Liber Cure Cocorum*." But the ascription of these documents to Lancashire is based on little more than conjecture; and the last two are late (fifteenth century).

2. The ending *-es* in the second singular preterite. Morris finds this in *Sir Amadace* once and several times in the texts under consideration. Morsbach rejected this criterion. A few minutes' search in Emerson's *Middle English Reader* reveals *myhtes* (*Peterborough Chronicle*, p. 3, l. 25), *wuldes* (*Bestiary*, p. 19, l. 3), *higtes* (p. 17, l. 27).

3. "The use of the verb *schin* or *schun* = *schal*, shall." This is not quite correctly stated: the form is a plural, in function = *schulen*. This form Morris finds in *Cleanness*, *Liber Cure Cocorum*, and the *Awntyrs of Arthure*, and he says it is still preserved in Lancashire dialect as *schunnot* = "shall not." The modern dialect form seems rather a case of assimilation of *l* to *n* before "not," as in our "shan't," "won't." The Middle English form is a rare one, occurring

¹ *Early English Alliterative Poems*, p. xxiii.

² Schwahn, *Die Konjugation in Sir Gawayn and the Green Knight*, etc., pp. 6-7.

³ Wright, *Dialect Grammar*, p. 296. In the plural one must distinguish between cases in which "the verb is immediately preceded or followed by its proper pronoun" (where the form *-en* or its descendant appears) and all other cases (where *-es* appears in these dialects).

in *GGK* once (l. 401) and in *Cleanness* twice (*schin* 1435, *schyn* 1810), but we find *schun* several times in the returns of the guilds of Lynne (Norfolk),¹ and *schone* and *schyn* (twice) in the *Boke of Curtasye*.²

4. Finally, Morris considers the use of *hit* as a genitive an evidence because it is found in the romances edited by Robson and in the present Lancashire dialect.³ This does seem to be a grammatical peculiarity special to these texts, *De Erkenwalde* and the *Awntyrs of Arthure* in the fourteenth century. At any rate the *New English Dictionary* gives no other citations for so early a date. Later, however, it came to be very common, and is familiar to Shakspearean scholars. In the modern dialects it is found over the north of England.⁴ Thus, although the appearance of this use is striking, it does not associate the texts with any locality.

These four points comprise Morris' entire proof. From the foregoing survey of them it must be apparent that they are of no value for localizing texts. The associations with modern dialect here given are useless as evidence of Middle English grammar. Aside from those, Morris has shown some resemblances between these texts and other documents whose provenience is not known. His first criterion, the present inflection of the verb, is important, but the same forms are found elsewhere. The last two are sound, but considering how rarely they occur in these texts we must recognize that they may be due to a scribe, and in any case they do not connect the poems with any surely Western document.

In 1867 Skeat in discussing the dialect of *William of Palerne*, said that the forms were "mainly West Midland."⁵ He added, however: "The real difficulty consists in this, that it is hard to

¹ Smith, *English Guilds*, E.E.T.S., pp. 67, 109.

² *Babees Boke*, E.E.T.S.; pp. 318, 319.

³ Morris' remark, "Nothing is more common in the present poems than the use of *hit* as a genitive," is hardly true. It occurs twice in *Patience*, four times in *Pearl* (see Osgood's glossary), seven times in *Cleanness* (some doubtful—ll. 264, 956, 1016, 1021, 1031, 1480, 1735), and not at all in *GGK*.

⁴ Wright, *Dialect Grammar*, p. 275: North Country. Lan. Chs. Der. Not. Lin. Lei. Nhp.

⁵ Introduction to *William of Palerne*, E.E.T.S., E.S., Vol. I, pp. xl-xli. He states that Madden referred it to Gloucestershire (see the same Introduction, pp. xxi-xxii. Madden adds the qualification, "although the orthography by no means betrays that decided Western pronunciation which characterizes the poems ascribed to Robert of Gloucester") and Morris to Shropshire. See above, p. 1.

account for the use of the Northumbrian plural-ending *-es* at a place situated so far to the South."

How firmly fixed the ascription to the West Midland had become is indicated by the fact that in the same year the editor of *Chevalere Assigne* quotes Morris as follows: "The Dialect [of *Chevalere Assigne*] in its *present form* is East Midland. But as we do not find [other] East Midland writers adopting alliterative measures in the 14th century, I am inclined to think that the original English text was written in the N. or N.W. of England."¹

In 1871 Skeat in his preface to *Joseph of Arimathie* says that his statement (made in his *Essay on Alliterative Poetry*) that the best examples of alliterative verse are found in Northern and Western dialects "holds true in the present instance, the southern forms in the poem being due to a southern scribe." He states categorically that the poem was originally in a West Midland dialect.²

The editors of *The Destruction of Troy* regarded the poem as originally Northern but altered by a West Midland scribe.³ In 1876 Trautmann accepted the West Midland location for *GGK*.⁴ Horstmann in his prefatory note to *De Erkenwalde* (1881) said: "Die Legende gehört zu der Gruppe der westnördlichen alliterierenden . . . Dichtungen der 2. Hälfte des 14. Jdts wie *Troy Book*, *Morte Arthur*, *Gawayne*," etc.⁵

It will be noticed that none of the above-mentioned scholars gives any evidence connecting the poems with the west. They evidently assume that Morris' location of the Gawayne group was correct and merely attach their poems to that group. Similarly in 1885 Fick adds nothing new. He begins thus: "Der Dialect der P. [= *Pearl*] war ursprünglich im Grossen und Ganzen ein rein westmittelländischer, der dem nördlichen Sprachgebiet jedoch nicht allzu fern stand."⁶ He states the endings found in the present indicative, saying that they are found both in the North and in the

¹ E.E.T.S., E.S., Vol. VI, p. xvii.

² E.E.T.S., Vol. 44, p. xi. Of course that part of Skeat's statement (and also of Morris' just cited) which connects alliterative poetry with the North is correct.

³ E.E.T.S., Vol. 56, p. lv.

⁴ *Über Verfasser u. Entstehungszeit einiger allit. Gedichte*, etc., p. 5.

⁵ *Altenglische Legenden*, N.F, p. 266.

⁶ *Zur me. Gedicht von der Perle*, p. 7.

West Midland. He regards the present participle, "welches ausschliesslich *-ande* lautet,"¹ as evidence of strong Northern influence. He gives other instances of Northern influence, and some of Southern, concluding that the latter are due to a scribe.

It seems not worth while to cite other dissertations on the language of these pieces and similar studies which have assumed the correctness of Morris' view.² Let us proceed to the articles which have made an effort with new evidence to fix the dialect of these poems. Dr. Richard Jordan in his attempt on the basis of various monographs on single documents to establish the boundaries of the Middle English dialects locates *GGK* and the *Alliterative Poems* in the Northwest Midland—but not beyond Lancashire because of the rimes of $\bar{o} < \text{O.E. } \bar{a}$.³ His evidence, however, is slight. "Charakteristisch für das Westl. Mittelland," he says, "ist das *u*, namentlich in *burd bryd*,"⁴ and *u* $< \text{O.E. } eo$; similarly *o* ($< \text{O.E. } a$) before *n* is more common in the West. There is nothing fixed in any of these criteria, since all those peculiarities can be found, to some extent at least, everywhere in the South and Midland, and the group of peculiarities as a whole is not found in any document actually localized in the West.

An attempt at a more fundamental means of localizing texts was made in 1913 by Professor Wyld.⁵ He collected from charters and other contemporary documents the spellings of place-names in which appear O.E. $\check{y} < \check{u}$ before *i* or *j*, e. g., *brycg*, *hyll*. His results show that O.E. \check{y} appears as *u* or *i* in all the Midland countries,⁶ as far north as Lancashire and Yorkshire, as far south as Herefordshire and Oxfordshire. Most of these counties also show a sprinkling

¹ P. S. The statement is not strictly true; cf. *schymeryng* in l. 80, and *sykyng* in l. 1175.

² Or even such statements as that of Skeat in his *English Dialects* (1911), pp. 79–81. Almost every work on Middle English language, whether of a general character or a monograph on an individual document or problem, has assumed the correctness of this localization and referred to "West Midland." The cumulation of such statements, however, proves nothing.

³ *Ger. Rom. Mon.*, II, 130. He refers to Morsbach, paragraph 135, A.4. Morsbach discusses these documents, however, in paragraph 135, A.9, there concluding that \bar{a} was the native form for the author. For comment on this view, see below, p. 21, note 1.

⁴ P. 130, n. 3.

⁵ *Englische Studien*, XLVII, 1 ff.

⁶ Excepting Notts, Lincoln, Rutland, Cambridge, Suffolk, and Essex.

of *e* spellings. These various spellings appear in different proportions in the different counties. Professor Wyld regards the proportions as significant and assigns texts to the counties whose proportion of *i* spellings coincides most nearly with that exhibited in the texts.

The idea of using original charters and documents capable of localization is an improvement over Pogatscher's method in studying the \bar{a} - \bar{e} boundary in Old English.¹ But Professor Wyld's use of these materials does not awaken confidence. He does not, for example, consider the probability that scribes had not always lived in places in which they wrote, or that they intentionally followed a spelling standard derived from some place outside the county. To how considerable a degree scribes could mix their dialectal forms even in Old English has been shown definitely by Professor W. F. Bryan.²

Likewise, Wyld's assignment of individual texts is unconvincing. If his materials showed that either *i* or *u* appeared practically to the exclusion of the other in a given territory, we could feel sure that a text having that spelling belonged to that territory (or at least that one of its scribes did). But when we find merely proportions—so many more *u*'s than *i*'s here, not so many *u*'s there, etc.—we can feel no confidence. If the poet used both *u* and *i*, whim or chance might cause him to use a larger percentage of one than his county place-names show. Furthermore, by the time that his poem has been copied a few times his own percentage of *u*'s or *i*'s will in all likelihood be entirely altered by the scribes.

Moreover, there is nothing stable in such proportions. Some years ago, at the suggestion of Professor Morsbach, I tried to check up Pogatscher's results for the \bar{a} - \bar{e} boundary by early deeds and other documents. I found, of course, that the same town was called Stratford or Stretford, Stratton or Stretton, and the proportion of spellings varied with each new set of documents. For a time the spelling of the name of a given place would show a certain proportion, but the spellings of a new set of documents would alter it decidedly. Such fluctuating results, it seems to me, are of little value, if any, in determining the provenience of documents.

¹ *Anglia*, XXIII, 302. See the criticism by O. Ritter, *Anglia*, XXXVII, 269.

² See his *Studies in the Dialects of the Kentish Charters*, etc., especially Parts II and III.

Finally, Professor Wyld is unable to make his results agree with the facts which localize a few of our texts. For example, he says: "The later Myrc and Audelay might be placed, the former in Lancs, the latter in Derbyshire, if we take the proportion of *u*- to *i*- forms as a test. . . . If we place M and A in Shropshire, the number of *i*- forms which they show is more difficult to explain"—a remarkable statement, considering the fact that the manuscript of the *Festial* calls Myrc a canon of Lulshull, Shropshire, and that this is confirmed by his writing of Alkmund, patron of Lulshull!¹ Audelay likewise is said to have been chaplain in the cloister of Haghman, Shropshire. Similarly Wyld's place-name results do not agree with the exterior evidence as to *St. Editha*. He says: "The proportion of *i*'s is far larger than in the Pl. N. forms, but this may no doubt be accounted for, either by the spread of the Devonshire unrounded type,"² etc. Obviously if we must seek explanations, the localization according to his results can be of little value. His assignment of the *Alliterative Poems* and *William of Palerne* to Derby does not even agree with his facts. The Derby place-names show twice as many *u* spellings as *i* spellings; the *Alliterative Poems* show twice as many *i* as *u* spellings!³

Thus Professor Wyld's study (the only real attempt to connect the poems with a definite locality since Dr. Morris') fails. The

¹ See Wells, *Manual*, p. 301.

² P. 146.

³ Derby place-names, 256 *u*: 121 *i*. *Alliterative Poems*: different words, 19 *u*: 37 *i* (*y*); total occurrences, 38 *u*: 111 *i* (*y*). The last set of figures is not complete, for Mr. Wyld does not refer to all instances of *i* spelling but puts "etc." after giving a considerable number of spellings. He does give all *u* spellings. (At least there is no "etc." used in them.)

As to *William of Palerne* the reader should recall the definite interior evidence for Gloucester.

Professor Wyld does not locate *GGK*. He says: "I did not include *Piers Plowman*, or the *Brut*, as the dialect of these texts differs from the other W. Midl. texts in having a considerable number of \check{y} for the specifically W.S. \check{y} , earlier \check{ie} (from \check{ea} -*i*). For the same reason I did not include *Gawain*; the dialect is distinctly different from that of the *Alliterative Poems*." I am not sure whether he means that *GGK* is excluded for the same reason as *Piers the Plowman* and *Brut* or for other dialectal reasons. Knigge's careful study did not show more *y*'s corresponding to W.S. y (= *ie*) in *GGK* than in the *Alliterative Poems*, and the proportion of *i*'s, *u*'s, and *e*'s from $y = u$ *i*, *j*, is the same in *GGK* as in them. There are of course dialectic differences between *GGK* and the *Alliterative Poems*, or individual members of that group (some pointed out by Knigge, some not), but I have found none which seem to me sure indication of difference in dialect of the authors. In his work on "Guttural Sounds in English" (*Trans. Phil. Soc. London*, XXXI, 163-64) Professor Wyld refers to *GGK* as "North 1366," to the *Alliterative Poems* as "Lancs. 1360." It is to be hoped that he will publish his evidence on this point soon.

poems may be from the West Midland, but no significant evidence has yet been given to prove that location.¹ When we stop to consider the facts, we must be astonished that the opinion of West Midland location for these documents has been so long unchallenged, especially when we observe that these texts do not resemble the documents whose provenience in the West is established by definite evidence. The only documents that we can assign through direct evidence to the West Midland are Myrc's and Audelay's works and *William of Palerne*. *The Earliest Complete English Prose Psalter*, which in language resembles Myrc and Audelay, not the *Alliterative Poems*, is generally ascribed to that locality on linguistic evidence.² Of these Morsbach practically rejects *William of Palerne* because of its dialect mixture.³ Comparison of Myrc and Audelay with the alliterative poems shows marked differences in dialect. To use one of the most obvious of criteria, the present inflection of the verb, we find in Myrc (and in the *Psalter*) *-e*, *-est*, *eth*, *e(n)*. Audelay has the same forms, and in addition some second and third singulars in *-es*. He is later, of course, and perhaps his occasional use of those forms is evidence of the movement which spread them widely over the modern Midland district. This is all that we know about the present inflection in the West Midland; the forms are the same as those in the East.⁴ Yet in these poems the forms in *-es* have been regarded as typically West Midland!

Why, then, has this localization lasted so long? Its acceptance has probably depended not upon linguistic evidence but upon other facts. These poems are in meter and general appearance (vocabulary, spelling, etc.) extremely unlike the works of Chaucer or Robert of Brunne, Laȝamon, or any of the prose writers whose provenience we know. Indeed their language seems to correspond to no known dialect. Hence the scholar tends to place them at some spot where

¹ Boerner has made the suggestion that the feminine pronoun *ho* is a mark of West Midland. It is a fact that in the modern dialect of the West Midland the feminine pronoun is *ū*. See Boerner, *Die Sprache Robert Mannings of Brunne*, pp. 216-17, and Wright, *Dialect Grammar*, p. 273. But other Middle English documents have forms which, though spelt somewhat differently, may equal *ho*. See *New English Dictionary*. This is really the best evidence of West Midland localization yet given, but one detail based wholly on modern dialect can hardly be convincing.

² Morsbach, *M. e. Gram.*, p. 9; Bülbring's edition of the *Psalter*, E.E.T.S.

³ See also Kaluza, *Engl. St.*, X, 294.

⁴ See the quotation from Morsbach above, p. 2.

we have no dialectal remains. We have documents from the center and east of North England, from East Midland, and various parts of the South, but nothing from the West country north of Shropshire and Herefordshire. As the poems certainly possess Northern features, it seems not illogical to locate them in the Northwest. Moreover, such an arrangement places nearly the whole body of alliterative verse in a corner of England, leaving *Piers the Plowman* for a neighboring county and a few scattered examples elsewhere. The advantage of this grouping is that it agrees with a subconscious view that a movement or "school" was responsible for the revival of alliterative verse. Finally, the scenery of some of the poems suggests a western location. This is particularly true of the *Auntyrs of Arthure*, but it should be noted that the location there is the northern part of Cumberland. It is certainly clear that the author knew Cumberland and the southwestern part of Scotland.¹ For this reason, Wells says it was probably composed near Carlisle,² but the customary opinion is that it was produced in Lancashire.³ The trouble with the former statement, from the point of view of the dialect scholar, is that the language of the poem does not seem so Northern as this localization would imply.

Similarly, the description of Gawain's winter journey is generally connected with the West country, but there is nothing surely local in it until l. 697. Then we are told that he went into North Wales, holding Anglesey upon his left and faring

ouer þe fordeȝ by þe for-londeȝ
 Ouer at þe Holy-Hede, til he hade eft bonk
 In þe wyldernesse of Wyrale.

Professor Chambers has pointed out the impossibility of this feat and suggested that "Holy-Hede" is a scribal mistake for Holy Well.⁴ That is entirely reasonable, but on the other hand the author may have made the mistake. If he did, of course he shows the vagueness of his knowledge of the West. If he did not, he

¹ See Robson's *Three Metrical Romances*, Camden Society, pp. xiv-xvi.

² *Manual*, p. 61.

³ See the quotation from Morris above, p. 4, and Schofield, *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer*, p. 218. Mr. Bradley has a theory that "the local knowledge of Cumberland which appears in the *Auntyrs* may be due" to an adapter, who turned the poem from West Midland into Northern (*Athenaeum*, August 12, 1901).

⁴ *Modern Language Review*, II (1906-7), 167.

knew the West, but that is no proof that he wrote there. In view of the weakness of even the last-mentioned type of evidence, it is apparent that the localization in the West is not justified. We ought, therefore, to consider the question as still open and look at the facts in an unprejudiced way.

In the pages that follow I am not attempting to locate *GCK* and the other poems with any definiteness as Morris, Jordan, and Wyld have tried to do, because with our present knowledge of Middle English dialects, I do not believe it possible to do so.¹ It is time for us to realize that exact location of Middle English documents on linguistic grounds only is impossible. As Professor Kittredge says:

For (may one dare to whisper it?) Middle English dialectology is not by any means reducible, in the present state of our knowledge, to any such hard and fast scheme as one might suppose from the confident little treatises that appear from time to time from aspirants for academic honours. There has been too much cocksureness in assigning this, that, or the other document to the southwest corner of the northeast Midland district, or in declaring that a writer must have been born five or six miles from Lichfield and passed some of his maturer years in the outskirts of Warwick²

When one considers the small number of documents we possess that can be located with certainty, and the vast spaces of country about whose speech we know nothing, one must recognize the folly of attempts at exact localization. The problem is still more complicated by the fact that our best records of the speech of particular places show remarkable dialectal mixture. Probably the dialect of any county of fourteenth-century England was much more mixed than we commonly suppose. Distances were small; travel on the part of pilgrims and merchants extensive; the countryman attended markets and fairs; craftsmen might move to places where there was special demand for their services; the friars and other migratory ecclesiastics were constantly going and coming. Documents which most nearly express the actual speech of localities and have probably suffered least alteration by scribes, like the reports of the Norfolk guilds and even at a much earlier time the proclamation of Henry III,

¹ Of course we can classify documents loosely as Northern, Midland, or Southern. I mean that in most cases we cannot ascribe a work to a particular locality in one of those districts.

² *Congress of Arts and Sciences III* (1906), 226.

show extraordinary dialect mixture. Furthermore, it is at present usually impossible to separate the dialect of scribes from that of authors. Finally, in the case of the alliterative poems we have additional complication: we are dealing with sophisticated authors, who read French romances and Latin prose, knew courtly customs, certainly used archaic words and probably old-fashioned forms. Some of these men, perhaps most of them, knew London (e.g., the authors of *Winner and Waster*, *Piers the Plowman*). *De Erkenwalde* celebrates a London saint. The writers of these poems preferred not to use the speech of the capital, but instead used a language which had for its basis perhaps some particular dialect (which was possibly traditionally associated with alliterative verse), altering it probably in the direction of their own native dialect. So, for instance, the extraordinary mixture of *William of Palerne* may be due to the attempt of a Southern man to use a Northern dialect.¹

Considering all these facts, we must be satisfied with vague results—certainly a better thing than to cheat ourselves by pretending to know more than we actually do. My aim throughout the remainder of this article, therefore, will be merely to examine the most clearly substantiated data that we have on the dialects, to note correspondences with the linguistic facts of *GGK*, and to determine what conclusion *can* be reached on a basis of real fact.

Now the general features of the dialect of *GGK* and the *Alliterative Poems* (to which I am from this point limiting myself) are: (1) inflections in the main like those we find in the North, (2) phonology largely Midland. By (1) I mean, for example, the present inflection of the verb,² the present participle ending in *-ande*, the lack of *y-* in the past participles or other verbal forms, the lack of many weak nouns.³ As to (2), one needs only read a bit of Rolle's prose to see the differences in phonology. O.E. *ā* in most cases is written *o* and it is rimed with lengthened short *o*;⁴ in the verb *to be*,

¹ Merely a suggestion, of course. The mixture may be due to scribal alterations.

² For this see p. 3 above.

³ The uncertainty of final *-e* is in a way a matter of inflection as well as of phonology; the *-e* is established in *GGK*, l. 415, for *sope*: to *pe*, and in ll. 2353, 2355. But compare l. 278 to *fyȝt*, riming with *knȝȝt*, 1766; *gode* (plural) riming with *stod* (singular).

⁴ Knigge presents the facts well (*Die Sprache des Dichters vom Sir Gawain*, etc., pp. 31–32). Within the line he finds "wir haben weniger *a-* Formen als wir nach den Reimen hätten erwarten können," and concludes therefore that the scribe was from

are appears instead of *ere*, *is* instead of *es*. As noun or verb ending we have *-es*, not *is* or *ys*; we find *schal* instead of *sal*, etc. There are other peculiarities, of course, especially the *-y-* of second weak and French verbs; but in the main the distinction holds true.

The question then becomes: Can we find a mixture of Northern and Midland similar to the one found in *GGK* in any definitely localized document? Such a mixture does in fact occur in the North Midland generally. So far as one can judge from the few texts which state definitely their location, it occurs all along the border between the Northern and Midland dialects.¹

Among the most valuable of the documents we have are the returns of the Norfolk guilds. These have certain unique advantages: they are dated definitely in 1389; they are original documents, uncopied; they were presumably drawn up by unsophisticated writers whose effort was simply to express themselves. These reports show a remarkable variety of forms. The present participle for example ends in *-and(e)*, *end(e)*, *-yng(e)*.² The first and second person singular present indicative are not found. The third person ends in *-th(e)*, *tȝ*, *t*, *ȝ*, and *s*.³ Of these *s* is decidedly less frequent than the others (all of which mean *th*), but in some of the reports it is found almost exclusively. The plural present

a more Southern locality than the poet. This seems to me an unfounded judgment. The poet certainly wrote in a locality not far from Northern dialect speakers. He knew the pronunciation *mare* as well as *more*, and when he found it convenient used the former. Arguments based on proportions are valueless. See Professor Osgood's edition of *Pearl*, pp. xii, xlii. A sufficient explanation of the smaller number of *a*'s within the line would be that the author had no need to use them there.

Morsbach, however, says: "In der heimat des dichters a gegolten hat" (*M. e. Gram.*, paragraph 135, A9). His judgment is based on the forms *tôcz* (*Pearl*, l. 513), and *tô* (*GGK*, l. 1671) not in rime. Osgood derives the former from O.E. *tæon* (not, as Morsbach does, from *tacan*); the same etymology will serve for *GGK*, l. 1671, and perhaps for the more difficult *tone GGK*, l. 2159 (riming with *one* and *grone*) which Morsbach seems not to have noticed, though he discusses the same form in *Ipomadon* A in the same paragraph.

¹ As long ago as 1893, Brandl recognized the existence of such a mixed dialect (Paul's *Grundriss*,¹ II, 612). He does not, of course, associate the alliterative romances with this district.

² E. Schultz: *Die Sprache der "English Guilds,"* pp. 36, 38. On the spread of *-ande* in the East Midland see Dibelius, *Anglia*, XXIV, 255. He finds it in Capgrave, a Suffolk will of 1482, Norfolk documents, and the Paston Letters.

³ Not mentioned by Schultz, but see *entreȝ*, *English Guilds*, E.E.T.S., p. 54. For the other forms see Schultz, pp. 37, 39. Schultz shows on pp. 27-28 that *ȝ* in these endings stands for *p*. It must be noticed, however, that at least once *ȝ* is used for *s* in the plural noun *Covenanteȝ*, (*English Guilds*, E.E.T.S., p. 109). Perhaps the form *entreȝ* cited above stands for *entres*.

indicative ends in *-en*, or *-e*, *-th*, *tȝ*, or *s*, the first two being much the most frequent.¹

One French verb, *fail*, shows forms in *i* like those found occasionally in the *Alliterative Poems* and *GGK*.² *Schal*, not *sal*, is the common form. Of the pronouns, the nominative singular feminine does not occur. The plural nominative is generally *bei*, but sometimes *he*, genitive plural *here*, dative plural *hem* (Schultz, p. 33).

The phonology is prevailingly Midland. O.E. *ā* > *ō* (Schultz, p. 13), *y* > *i* (*y*), seldom *e*, *u* (in *furst*, *frust*) (Schultz, p. 11), *h* is weak, and in the combination *hw* (frequently written *qu*) it seems to have been silent, as in the *Alliterative Poems* (Schultz, p. 25).

In Norfolk, then, we have in general Midland phonology and mixed Midland and Northern verbal endings. There is too large a Midland element in these endings to make it likely that *GGK* was written in Norfolk, and details of phonology like the *u* spellings for O.E. *y* do not agree. It is to be noted, however, that a literary artist might possibly elect to use the Northern endings in this mixture in order to have his language more unified or because he found those endings in use in other poems; most of the grammatical peculiarities of *GGK* and the *Alliterative Poems* existed in Norfolk ready to hand.³

Robert Manning, who wrote his first work early in the fourteenth century, can be localized in Lincolnshire. Of course no autograph manuscript of his is extant, and, as Boerner has shown, the two main works in their present form display dialect differences. These may be due, as Boerner thinks, to alterations in Robert's own speech⁴ or to changes made by scribes. The present participle ends in *-ing* (*-yng*) and *-and* in the proportion of 3:1. The second singular present indicative within the line and in self-rime ends in *-est* (*-yst*). In rime it is found only in a few cases; there *-es* (*ys*) occurs almost always ("fest stets").⁵ For the third singular *-es* is without excep-

¹ Schultz, *op. cit.*, pp. 37, 39. For the endings of *GGK* see p. 3.

² E.E.T.S., pp. 30, 43, 72, 97, 103.

³ I have not considered it necessary to discuss Furnivall's criteria for Norfolk dialect (*The Macro Plays*, E.E.T.S., p. xxxv), as they apply to the fifteenth century. The use of *z* for *sh* is purely scribal; *qu* for *wh* appears in the *Alliterative Poems*; *w* is written for *u* in *Pearl*.

⁴ *Die Sprache Robert Mannings of Brunne*, etc., p. 11.

⁵ Boerner, p. 221.

tion established in rime, but the scribe of *Handlyng Synne* has frequently substituted *-eth* for it.¹ The plural ends in *-e*, *-en*, *-es*, or *ys*, the last two rarely. In one case the *-i* of the O.E. second weak verbs is retained and established by rime, *wanye* (Boerner, p. 218). Among the pronouns *sche* is established by rime, but *scho* also occurs within the line. In the nominative plural *þei* appears in rime, *ha* occasionally within the line. In the dative *hem* is usual, but *hom* occurs once in rime (Boerner, pp. 216-17) O.E. *ā* appears both as *o* and *a* (Boerner, p. 210.)

Though *Havelok* has not been so certainly located as the documents hitherto considered and its manuscript gives a corrupt text, it presumably comes from Lincoln. Its verbal forms agree with Robert Manning's, e.g., though *-est*, *ep* occur, *-es* is more common in both cases and is established by rime. The most common present participle ending, however, is *-inde*.²

The *Towneley Plays*, if they are derived from Wakefield, ought also to be considered. Their language seems never to have been thoroughly studied. A cursory reading, however, shows most of the peculiarities we have noticed: present participle in *-and*; second and third singular present indicative in *-es*, *-ys*, *-is*; the plural generally without ending but occasionally like the singular; O.E. *ā* > *ō* generally, but sometimes appears as *a*.

From these evidences it is clear that in the North Midland we find a verbal flexion similar to that in *GGK* and the *Alliterative Poems*, and in general a Midland phonology with occasional Northern admixture, as in those poems. Of course there are plenty of differences in detail, and it is not suggested that the poems were written in exactly the same place as any of the documents just discussed. Indeed, the resemblances are only in certain larger features and cannot be traced in all fine details, and my purpose in showing them is merely to make clear that a mixture of Northern and Midland, in some respects like that of the romances, does occur on the border between those dialects. The reader accustomed to the thorough and exact analyses of monographs on language may be shocked by the use of such rough criteria. But he should remember that

¹ Boerner, p. 223.

² See Skeat's edition, 1902, pp. xx-xxiii.

no such similarities between the *Alliterative Poems* and any Western texts have ever been shown. Until some evidence which does connect with the West is produced, we are therefore justified only in saying that these are North Midland documents. All along the border between the North and the Midland there were doubtless many speech districts showing variant mixture. For most of these we have no evidence; but we do know that several of them show general resemblances to the language of *GCK* and the *Alliterative Poems*, and it is reasonable to suppose that in one of them the poems were written. That spot may have been in the Northwest Midland (though we know nothing whatever of speech conditions there), but it may as well have been in the North Central or Northeast Midland. It should be noted in this connection that of the alliterative poetry which is localized (e.g., the York plays and Rolle) most is Northern. Finally, the conclusion that the North was the field of alliterative poetry agrees with the implication in Chaucer's Parson's remark. He did not say he was an Eastern man, but—

I am a *southren* man,

I kan not geeste "rum, ram, ruf" by lettre.¹

These, then, are the results of the foregoing study: (1) There is no good evidence to connect alliterative romances with the West; their language should not be called *West* Midland; and (2) until new facts are found the only safe statement of the location of these poems is that they were probably written in some place which possessed a mixed Northern and Midland dialect.

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¹ As to the other alliterative romances, I see no reason why we should not accept the plain indication that *William of Palerne* was written in Gloucester. The inconsistent conglomeration of dialect forms in it may be due: (1) to scribes; or (2) to the author's imitation of the more Northerly dialect which may have been found in romances no longer extant. If we could be sure that scribes have not greatly altered the language of the other documents, we might locate *Alexander A* and *B* with *William*, or in some neighboring county, *The Awntyrs off Arthure* somewhere north of the place in which the poems in *Nero AX* were written, and *The Destruction of Troy*, *The Wars of Alexander*, and *Morte Arthure* still further north. But that is decidedly speculative. In any case the bulk of alliterative verse (aside from *Piers the Plowman*) seems to belong in the North and North Midland, with only occasional pieces like *William of Palerne* and the *Chevalere Assigne* deriving from Southern localities.